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ABSTRACT

Written by a workplace literacy teacher, this writing curriculum guide contains information, reflections, and student handouts for teaching writing to adult students. Topics covered include motivation to write, misconceptions about writing, the writing process (rehearsal, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing), spelling, and voice. (KC)

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ED 426 227

WRITING CURRICULUM

prepared by Bo Hewey

Casco Bay Partnership for Workplace Education

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Introduction

I have struggled for almost a year to put together a product which represented my curriculum. One reason it has been difficult for me to complete this project is because my classes keep changing. They once were titled "Reading and Writing"; now they are "Computer Writing" classes. This transformation alone does not explain my difficulties. The truth is my classes have never been the same and I suspect they never will be.

I am constantly learning while I teach. Experimenting, using new readings, borrowing from different sources, working on a revised description, or a better explanation. Forever imperfect, in transition, ready for change and adaptation. Donald Murray's chapter in *Taking Stock the Writing Process Movement in the '90's"* is titled "Knowing not Knowing". It is a good explanation of the writing process and I feel it also describes my teaching. Knowing not Knowing. Turning things over to the process of student discovery takes courage. It is often uncomfortable - that uncertainty - not being sure of exactly what will happen in each class, never relying on a textbook or prepackaged curriculum. The surrender of control is at times scary.

Murray explains: "From the beginning it was clear to me that my answers were speculations - guesses. Informed guesses but not TRUTHS." That is how I feel about presenting my curriculum. It is not the truth. It is not something other teachers should adopt or copy. Instead my hope is that in sharing it I can bring teachers to conference with me and together we can reconsider our practices and improve our teaching.

As teachers we have daily opportunities to affirm that our students' lives and language are unique and important.

L.Christensen

We must allow ourselves to care about our students and their learning in very personal and unguarded ways: we must acknowledge the enormous personal stake that we have in their growth and success, and they must know that.

Kutz, Groden,Zamel

Description

These two quotations guide my teaching.

If education is to be worthwhile it must help students value their lives by recognizing and celebrating their thoughts, feelings, language and experiences.

The way to nurture learning is to embrace caring by establishing relationships where people feel respected, recognized, and loved.

Reflection

Trying to build caring relationships guides my teaching. What matters more in life than helping to support and enhance caring ?

But how can I care for my students and help them become caring individuals when our society continually oppresses and marginalizes them? What am I to do when their lives and language are constantly considered of less importance and of less worth than people with power and money?

Writing is learned by writing, by reading, and by perceiving oneself as a writer.

-Frank Smith-

(4)

Description

One sentence that captures the essence of my curriculum. Writing, reading and building a community of writers.

Sometimes I may read this quotation at the beginning of a session and explain explicitly how I will be using this philosophy in structuring the class. I might emphasize learning by doing, perhaps by making a comparison such as learning to write and learning to run. I have on occasion had the class write about a past learning experience and then used these experiences to demonstrate how we learn best when we are actively engaged in whatever skill it is we want to learn, whether it is swimming, fixing a car, or writing.

Reflection

More important than learning to write by writing is my goal of having students begin to perceive themselves as writers and this quotation expresses that. It reminds me of my priorities: 1) to provide students the support needed to develop the perception that they are writers with stories worth telling, and 2) the opportunity to write. Encouragement and Time.

Times I write (try and list several examples):

Why I am writing? Who am I writing for?

How I feel when I am writing: how I feel about my writing:

Reasons I do not write (try and list several reasons):

Times I would like to write but do not:

How I feel when I do not write:

Why I took this class

Writing goals I have for this class

Description

My writing survey serves two purposes. It helps me assess my students' previous literacy experiences. It also is a starting point for students to begin thinking about writing and how it fits (or does not fit) in their lives.

Reflection

I have used many different initial surveys. I believe it is important for a teacher to use a beginning interview/survey that helps them to get to know their students. It is the starting point for understanding. Besides a writing survey I believe it is essential to find out about each student through a journal and/or class introductions. The more you know the more likely you may be able to build positive relationships with each student and design relevant and interesting classes.

Why write?

I write to clear my own mind, to find out what I think and feel.

V.S. Pritchett

I began to write because I was too shy to talk, and too lonely not to send messages.

H. McHugh

I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say.

F. O'Conner

Writing is my vacation from living.

E. O'Neill

I write to find out what I am thinking about.

E. Albee

Donald Murray *Shoptalk*
Portsmouth 1990

Description

I took these quotations from Donald Murray's *Shoptalk*. I use them to reinforce students thinking about the question "why write?". After the survey or a discussion about "why write?" I find introducing Murray's book contributes to creating a writing workshop environment.

Reflection

Murray's book is full of wonderful insights into writing. I have chosen these few because they emphasize the expressive and discovery aspects of writing. The concept of writing as thinking - as a means of discovery - is foreign to most people. Most of us have been assaulted with the message that writing is for show throughout our educational lives, and it is surprising and exciting to find out that "real" writers use writing in order to know.

You're the only person in the gene-pool with your possible set of experiences, perceptions, pleasures, tortures, difficulties in getting work done. Those things are unique, and if you fail to write those down in the best possible way and leave them for us, we'll never have them.

-William Matthews-

Examining Misconceptions About Writing

What misconceptions do you have about the way experienced writers work and about the nature of writing? Review the following lists of common misconceptions and the accompanying revised beliefs ("The Truth").

Common Misconceptions About Experienced Writers	***"The Truth"***
Good writers do not struggle.	All writers struggle; writing is work.
Good writers know "The Way" to write.	Good writers know the way they write. There are many ways of writing.
Good writers know what they want to say before they write.	Good writers often write to learn what they want to say.
Good writers write perfect copy the first time.	Good writers usually rewrite many times.

Common Misconceptions About the Nature of Writing	***"The Truth"***
Writing is an ordered, step-by-step process.	Writing is a to-and-fro process.
Writing involves directly transferring thoughts from the mind to paper.	Writing is a complex process. Thoughts don't automatically transfer.
Writing is an individual act; writers work alone.	Writing is a social act in the sense that writers draw on everything they have read, seen, heard, or known.

Pamela Gay *Developing Writers*
Wadsworth. 1995

You're the only person in the gene-pool with your possible set of experiences, perceptions, pleasures, tortures, difficulties in getting work done. Those things are unique, and if you fail to write those down in the best possible way and leave them for us, we'll never have them.

-William Matthews-

Pamela Gay *Developing Writers*
Wadsworth 1995

Description

I found these in Pamela Gay's book *Developing Writers*. Mathew's words provide the encouragement that can inspire people to value their own experiences and motivate them to capture and examine their thoughts. The "misconceptions about writing" bridges the gap between new writers and expert writers. It also serves to introduce the writing process and reinforce writing to know.

Reflection

It is liberating to find out that all writers go through the same struggles that new writers experience. The most common view of writing is that it is something others can do, and can do easily, but something I could never be able to do well because I don't have the natural skills. I often feel that way. We all need to keep hearing "The Truth".

Writing Process

Publishing

WRITING PROCESS

Rehearsal Thinking. Getting ready to write. Collecting **ideas**. Thinking about what you are going to write about - finding a topic. Practicing in your mind. Outlines doodles, notes, webs, brainstorming.

Drafting Time to write. Getting your ideas and thoughts onto paper. Don't worry about how it looks, capture it before it escapes. **Write, write, write.**

Revision Time to read what you have written. Time to make **changes**. Rewrite and reread. Read it to a friend. Does it say what you wanted? Does it sound right?

Editing Fix up the look of the writing. Mechanics, spelling, paragraphs, capitol letters, punctuation. **Polish**. Use resources: dictionaries, friends, word processors and spell checkers

Publishing Who is the piece for and why did you write it? The **final draft.**

Everyone has a different writing process.

Why learn about the writing process?

Finding out about how other people write helps us think about how we write.

Thinking about how you do something helps you do it better and enjoy it more.

What do you do when you write? What are you good at? What do you have trouble with? What is fun? What do you hate about writing? Try making a profile of you as a writer that tells about your writing process.

What I like about writing_____ _____

_____

What I do not like about writing_____

_____

What I am good at _____

_____

What I have trouble with_____

_____

What I do when I write _____

_____

_____

_____

REHEARSAL

Pre-writing

Thinking before you write

Collecting ideas

Finding a topic Planning

BRAINSTORMING

Let go and put down anything that comes into your head. Forget the form. Make a list or just write randomly all over your paper. Open up and let it flow putting down everything, good, bad, silly, serious, and crazy. Brainstorming can help you find a topic. It also helps you get going on a topic. Use it when your stuck. It taps into your hidden creativity.

MAPPING

Mapping is almost the same as brainstorming. It is a good way to generate ideas. The only difference is that mapping tries to make connections. If you have written all over a paper while brainstorming mapping can be a step in helping organize thoughts and words.

DRAWING

Sketching, doodling, playing around, all can be used to lead into writing. Don't limit yourself - experiment.

THINKING

Take a walk or a drive. Think in your head before you write.

TALK

A little conversation goes a long way. Try your ideas out with a friend. Tell your story before you write it. Compare your memories and experiences with others. Writing is social.

FREEWRITING

Some writers believe to much thinking can inhibit your writing. Try just writing. Write anything and everything. Do not worry about how it looks or even what it says. Know you will be going back. Know this is rehearsal; it isn't even close to a final draft. Call it an exploration draft if that helps you relax.

FREEWRITING

What is freewriting? Writing without stopping.

Why freewrite? Freewriting helps you find words to write. It is anxiety free.
Separates writing from revising.
Helps you write without thinking to much.
Helps you write when you don't feel like writing.
Is fun and a useful outlet.
Helps you find topics.

When should you freewrite? Anytime. Make a habit of it. It improves writing. It is particularly useful when you first start a writing project. It can help you solve problems. It helps you think.

adapted from
Peter Elbow's *Writing With Power*
Oxford, 1981

REVISION
Rewriting

It's a matter of rewriting. If I'm writing a story, I may rewrite a page 10, 12 times.
J. Berger

I have endless drafts, one after another; and try out 50, 75, or a hundred variations on a single line sometimes.
J. Dickey

I work not by writing but by rewriting. Each sentence has many drafts. Eventually there is a paragraph. This gets many drafts. Eventually there is a page. This gets many drafts.
W. Glass

The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon. You can always do it better, find the exact word, the apt phrase...
R. Cormier

It takes a long time to **write** just **right.** All writers write many **drafts** changing words, sentences, paragraphs and whole stories.

Revision is where much of the **work** of writing is done. Becoming a better writer means accepting that you will not get it right the first time.

It means learning to **enjoy** the work of **writing.** Experimenting, playing and most of all discovering more about yourself and your writing process.

Quotations from
Donald Murray's *Shoptalk*
Portsmouth, 1990

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REVISION
Rewriting

First Draft

ticaspleze, and trees.

discipline
delegate
dictate

~~In the fall of my 12 year~~

My mother's favorite clock tick-tocked its way towards noon ~~on a~~ while underneath 3 ~~of the~~ its owner's children waited for the family discussion to begin. Hardy dicussions at all, these gathering were an excuse for my dad to delegate jobs, dictate morality or merely to discipline. ~~This morning was different. As my dad eased himself into Electricity in the form of nervous glances hushed regards and~~ 6 small fishbowls each containing a ~~blue~~ single blue fish inspected my dad as he eased himself onto the family sofa 6 eardrums beat simoltaneously as he spoke. "I want one of you to go to ~~the opera~~ THE OPERA with me tonite ~~the words he used smelled of exp~~ downtown the tone he used ~~had an~~ carried the odor of expectation. ~~My sic~~ ~~for seemingly insulted at this pecudo~~ some ~~question~~ question My brother, a stickler for logic and reason retorted. What's the matter with mom? My ~~dad's~~ paper words were not so quick in reply, She's not feeling well this evening, he said ~~choopichly.~~ TO HIS SHOES Laughter boomed ~~out of~~ from our silent mouths. Well? he ~~said~~, itched for a reply. ~~The three of us turned to each other as if to~~

Second Draft

SIMULTANEOUSLY

(his tone carried the faint but distinct odor of expectation

Mother's favorite wal/nut clock tick-tocked its way towards noon while underneath, 3 of its owner's children waited for the family "discussion" to begin. Hardly discussions at all, these gatherings were an excuse for Dad to discipline, delegate jobs and dictate morality. Six small round fishbowls each containing a single blue fish inspected dad as he eased himself into the family sofa. Six eardrums beat simoltanously as he spoke. "I want one of you to go to the opera with me ~~to nite~~ tonight."

Not taken back by this peculiar request, my older brother, a stickler for logic and reason, ~~retorted~~, What's the matter with mom? Dad's paper words were not so quick in reply, "She's not feeling well this evening," he said to his shoes. Laughter boomed forth from our ever-silent ~~no~~ throats and echoed without a sound from the walls. ~~I~~ "Well?" Dad said itching for a reply. I half-turned to my brother when my silver-tonuged sister, wise in the ways of dealing with dad, ~~cracked~~ melted the silence. Her gentle words explained that her addenda was jam-packed with wholesome,

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Third Draft

Michael D. McCarthy

Ticaspleeze and Trees

1 Mother's favorite walnut clock tick-tocked towards noon while, underneath, three of its children waited for the family "discussion" to begin. Hardly discussions at all, these gatherings were an excuse for Dad to discipline, delegate jobs and dictate morality. Six small round fishbowls each containing a single blue fish inspected dad as he eased himself into the family sofa. Six eardrums beat simutaneously as he spoke, "I want one of you to go to the opera with me tonight."

2 Not taken aback by this peculiar request, my older brother, a stickler for logic and reason, retorted, "What's the matter with Mom?"

3 Dad's paper words were not so quick in reply, "She's not feeling well this evening," he said to his shoes. Laughter boomed forth from our ever silent throats and echoed without a sound from the walls. "Well?" Dad said, itching for a reply.

4 I had half-turned to my brother when my silver tounged sister, wise in the ways of dealing with Dad, melted the silence. Her

from *Bridges* by Donna Gorrell
Little, Brown 1985

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REVISION
Rewriting

Ticaspleeze and Trees

Mother's favorite walnut clock tick-tocked towards noon while, underneath, three of its children waited for the family "discussion" to begin. Hardly discussions at all, these gatherings were an excuse for Dad to discipline, delegate jobs, and dictate morality. Six small round fishbowls each containing a single blue fish inspected Dad as he eased himself into the family sofa. Six eardrums beat simultaneously as he spoke, "I want one of you to go to the opera with me tonight."

Not taken aback by this peculiar request, my older brother, a stickler for logic and reason, retorted, "What's the matter with Mom?"

Dad's paper words were not so quick in reply, "She's not feeling well this evening," he said to his shoes. Laughter boomed forth from our ever silent throats and echoed without a sound from the walls. "Well?" Dad said, itching for a reply.

I had half-turned to my brother when my silver-tongued sister, wise in the ways of dealing with Dad, melted the silence. Her gentle words explained that her agendum was jam-packed with wholesome, wholly false, activities. Without

SPELLING

Editing. When you have finished writing go back and look at each word carefully. Separate reading and revising your piece from editing. Editing is the time to look for misspelled words.

Get help. The best way to fix your spelling is to use resources. Spell checkers and good proof readers are the best. Dictionaries and word lists can help too. Even books and environmental print can help.

Spelling on my own.

1) Pronounce the word carefully. Listen carefully to how the word sounds.

2) Try writing the word different ways. Which looks right?

3) Check the meaning of the word you are using. It is easy to mix-up words. Cell and sell, sent and cent, week and weak.

4) Fitzgerald method for improving spelling.

1. Look at the word carefully.
2. Say the word.
3. With eyes closed, visualize the word.
4. Cover the word and then write it.
5. Check the spelling.
6. If the word is misspelled, repeat steps 1-5.

5) Last but not least.

1) Keep spelling in perspective. It is not very important. What you have to say is much more important. Spelling has nothing to do with intelligence. Many very intelligent people are bad spellers.

2) Defend yourself. Remind people that spelling is not that important. Remind them that spelling is not a function of how smart you are. Stand up for your writing!

EDITING

PROOFREADER'S CHECKLIST

_____Each sentence begins with a capital letter.

_____Each sentence ends with correct punctuation (. ? !).

_____ One space between words. Two spaces after a period.

_____The names of people and important places are capitalized.

_____"I" is always capitalized.

_____ Each new paragraph is indented.

_____ Speech marks (") are used to show when someone is talking.

_____ Use (') apostrophes in contractions - wasn't. Use ('s) to show possession.

_____ Spelling. Get help. Use resources such as dictionaries and spell checkers. Ask someone to proofread for you.

Reread your piece and self edit as best you can. Read your piece out loud. Use punctuation to help your writing sound the way you want it to.

Share your writing and don't be afraid to ask for help. It's not cheating. But remember always take help as suggestions. Change only what you want. It is <u>your</u> writing.

Description

I use this collection of papers to introduce the concept of Writing Process to students. Research has documented that helping people become aware of their composing process is one of the most beneficial steps towards writing improvement. I hope that these papers will help students discover and develop their own writing process.

Reflection

There are many books on writing and many ways of describing the composing process. I've created my own sheets which I supplement with books on writing. I have tried to keep my descriptions simple and easy to understand. When I talk about writing process I have three main goals. One is to help people separate out editing and get over what I call "English teacher phobia".

I also like to present the idea of rehearsal. Students need to value time spent thinking, talking and all that makes up prewriting. It is hard, if not unfair, to be asked to write on demand. I believe in letting people choose what they want to work on rather than provide them with topics. Discovering what you have to write about is as important as the act of writing itself.

Finally, I try to explain that it takes a long time to write right. Writing is hard work that is fun and rewarding when you are allowed to write for your own purposes and accept that perfection will never be accomplished.

MYTH

We all have been taught to think of writing as something you do by yourself.

THAT'S NOT REAL WRITING

That's writing because someone else is making you write in order to prove you know something. Writing as a test.

Real writing is when you write for your own purposes.

IT IS NOT CHEATING

Make it the best you can. It's fine to get help, ask for suggestions and reactions.

WRITING IS SOCIAL

Writers do not work alone. Every book published is read by many people. Check out the acknowledgements. Remember editors need to make a living too.

Description

One important learning I hope students remember from taking my class is that writing is not a solitary activity. I try to expose this myth and free writing from its place in schools where it is usually used to test students.

Reflection

It seems like such a simple message but most people have been brought up believing that you should never ask for help when writing because that's cheating. Not many of my adult students have ever experienced a writing conference. Most of my students have written almost exclusively to show. They need to escape their histories and encounter writing as a social experience where collaboration is not only acceptable but in fact encouraged.

Voice

What do you mean voice I thought we were talking about writing?

Voice may be a tricky concept in writing but it is an important one.

"It sounds real." "It has power." "You can really hear and see the writer." "It's intimate." "Genuine." "It is like conversation." "Natural." "It's not phony, there is a depth to it." "It has rhythm, energy and individuality."

Voice.....how do we know it and how do we capture it?

Let go. Be real. Take risks. Speak from you heart. Write about what is meaningful to you. Stand up for yourself and let yourself be heard.

Description

The primary objective I have for students is that they discover and use their voice. Explaining what voice means is difficult though. The concept of voice which I bring to my teaching is not limited to writing theory but also includes the notion of voice in broader social and political contexts. Standing up for your rights and asserting your self are as much a part of "voice" to me as is writing that is alive and real.

Reflection

I made this sheet a long time ago but only recently used it. I was surprised by the enthusiastic response it received and so I will experiment with it. I have read of ways of showing examples of voice by comparing good writing with strong voice to poor and lifeless writing. I do not like this approach because it limits the concept of voice to an evaluation of writing. I want people to think of voice as finding out who they are and valuing what they have to say. Being real rather then imitating others. I have found that it can be a profound experience for students to realize that their own language is acceptable and good to use when writing.

As teachers we have a responsibility always to reexamine the assumptions that shape our pedagogy and our curricula, to consider their implications and consequences, and to reconstruct those pedagogies and curricula repeatedly as our students change and as we change.

Zamel

Description

I believe it is essential that we as teachers continually remind ourselves of the changing nature of our profession and constantly reflect on what happens in our classrooms.

Reflection

As teachers we need to resist the temptation to accept the status quo. Instead we must always be changing, evolving and learning with our students. Teaching demands that we consider our actions, and the implications of our work in broad terms, constantly pushing ourselves to work for what we believe is right and just.

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